LOUISIANA Conservationist

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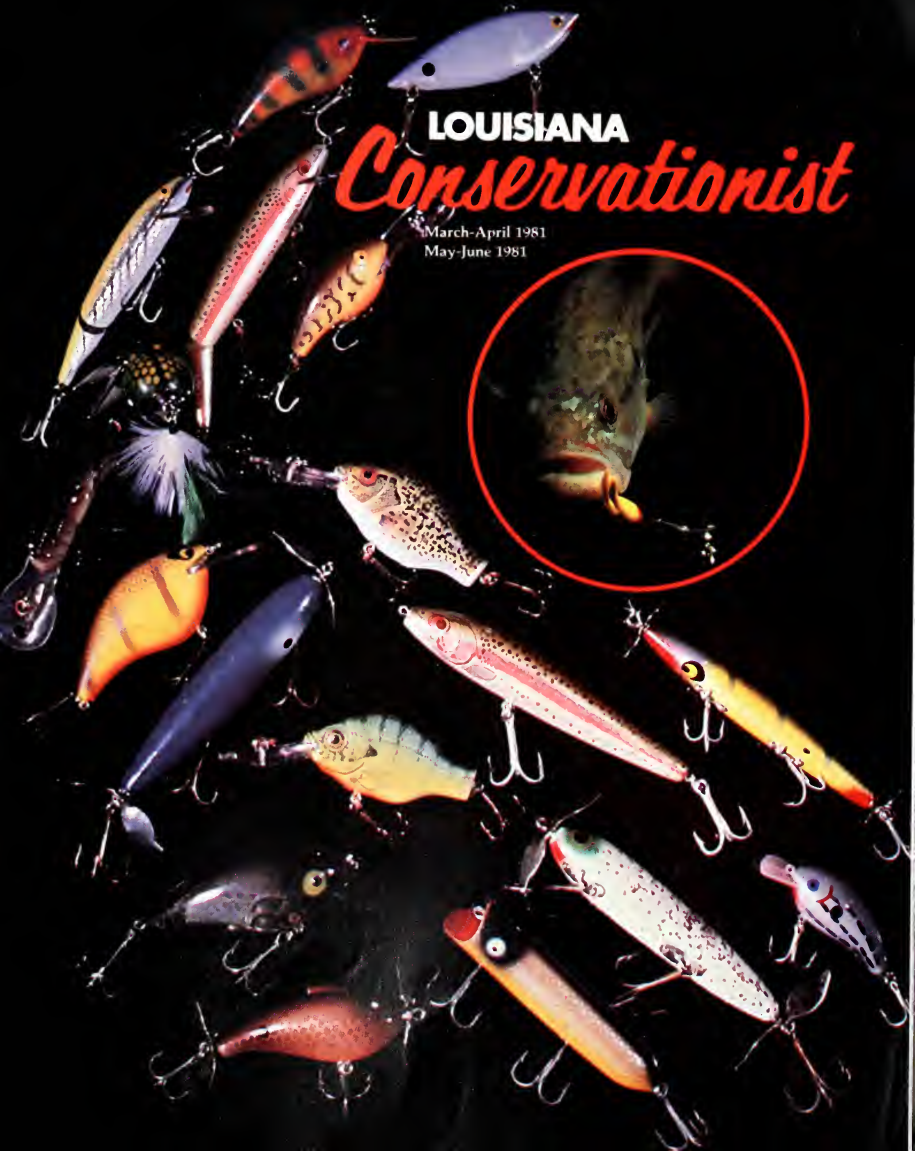

comments...

The only thing besides people that I claim to know is land. The greatest domestic problem facing our country is saving our soil and water. Our soil belongs to unborn generations.

Sam Rayburn

I am confident that the people of Louisiana, especially those hundreds of thousands of citizens who enjoy outdoor recreation in the form of hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, bird watching, wildlife photography and related activities, will be gratified to learn there has been a substantial enlargement of the wildlife management area system in recent weeks.

Special thanks are due Governor David C. Treen and the Louisiana Legislature for an appropriation of money last year that made possible the purchase in late January of 20,532 acres of prime wildlife habitat in Caldwell and Catahoula parishes for $10,030,000.

Gratitude is also expressed to International Paper Company for donating an additional 4,158 acres of adjacent land at the time of its sale to the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

The 24,690 acres acquired make an important addition to the department's wildlife management area system, and bring to 285,000 acres the amount of land owned outright by the department and dedicated for all time to public use for outdoor recreation.

The addition to the Boeuf Wildlife Management area in Caldwell Parish and the new management area in Catahoula Parish bring to 37 the number of strategically located management areas.

JESSE J. GUIDRY, *Secretary*

The new tracts bring the total number of acres under wildlife management for public use to 987,693 acres, almost a million acres of the best wildlife land in the state.

These lands represent every habitat type found in Louisiana: marsh, bottomland hardwoods, cypress tupelo swamps, mixed pine hardwoods, cut over pine lands, pure pines, and backwater areas along the Red River.

Probably no other program has grown so quickly in popularity than the land acquisition for outdoor recreation concept. It now furnishes a wide variety of activities for the state's outdoor enthusiasts and provides more than 700,000 outdoor trips annually to hunters, fishermen, boaters, campers, birdwatchers and many others.

Under the permanent acquisition plan, the department seeks to buy suitable wildlife land and open it for public use through the years ahead, managing and enhancing it for recreational purposes.

The program was begun in 1960. To date a total of $29,752,869 has been expended for acquisition. The Marsh Island Fund, derived from royalties from the refuge, furnished the major portion of the land money. $2,209,273 was furnished from the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Of the 285,000 acres now owned by the department, 195,000 acres are in bottomland hardwoods. Some 69,000 acres are in marshes and desirable wetlands.

The thrust of the land purchasing program has been directed toward bottomland hardwoods because in the past 20 years much of those lands which formerly furnished excellent hunting, fishing and recreational opportunity are being put into new uses.

We are losing our bottomland hardwoods at the rate of 125,000 acres a year, with much of this land being put into profitable agriculture.

In view of these land use changes and a steadily increasing population, the department's wildlife management area program takes on new meaning.

In years to come when suitable wildlife land is no longer available or affordable, the Louisiana acquisition program for outdoor recreation will be regarded as one of the most important programs ever initiated.

It was given much impetus in late January by the latest additions. With the full support of Governor Treen and members of the Louisiana Legislature, there is every reason to believe we will make additional progress in this program in the years immediately ahead.

Published by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in the interest of conservation of Louisiana's natural resources

LOUISIANA Conservationist

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THE LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION
THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION
AND
SEARS-ROEBUCK AND CO
FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WISE USE
AND MANAGEMENT OF LOUISIANA'S NATURAL RESOURCES DURING THE YEAR

Crisis in the Coastal Marsh

By David Fruge
Photography by Lloyd Poissenot

Editor's Note: David Fruge is senior field biologist with U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Lafayette.

Louisiana's vast coastal marshes are disappearing. The wetlands that support coastal Louisiana's rich fish and wildlife resources are literally vanishing. If the present rate of loss continues, major areas of the Louisiana coastal region will be claimed by water within fifty years.

These are the disturbing findings of recent studies conducted for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U. S. Bureau of Land Management by Coastal Environments, Inc., a Baton Rouge consulting firm headed by noted geologist Dr. Sherwood Gagliano.

The Problem

Studies show that the rate of change of Louisiana's coastal wetlands is two to three times greater than previously believed. Prior studies placed coastal land loss at 16½ square miles each year. Marsh losses alone now exceed thirty-nine square miles per year.

Figures further indicate that over 500,000 acres or 800 square miles of southeastern Louisiana coastal wetlands have been lost or drastically altered since the mid 1950's. Over 800,000 acres of land have been lost along the coast from Vermilion Bay to the Mississippi state line. Fresh water marsh has experienced greatest reduction (about 90% of the totals) with forested wetlands constituting a majority of the remaining wetlands changes. For the entire Louisiana coast, marsh losses alone now exceed 25,000 acres *each year.*

These figures are staggering.

Louisiana's wetlands provide habitat for more than two-thirds of the Mississippi Flyway's wintering waterfowl plus many other migratory birds such as rails,snipe, and gallinules. The largest fur and alligator harvests in the United States and over 25% of the country's commercial fisheries production come from our wetlands. The marshes and estuaries are nursery grounds for shrimp, oysters,and crabs, and stand as the basis for Louisiana's international reputation as a seafood state.

> **Wetlands loss in Louisiana is critical to waterfowl, alligators, furbearers, other wildlife, and commercial and sport fisheries.**

Important commercial species include shrimp, bluecrab, oysters, menhaden, croaker, speckled trout, sand trout, and redfish. The game fish list is even longer and Louisiana's coastal marshes are truly a paradise for recreational anglers.

No other state in the union enjoys such lush, productive wetlands.

The vast Louisiana coastal marshes stretch from the Sabine River on the west to the Pearl River on the east, and extend more than sixty miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. According to a survey conducted in 1968 by Dr. Robert Chabreck of Louisiana State University, coastal Louisiana contains about 2.5 million acres of fresh to saline marsh, 1.8 million acres of ponds and lakes, and 2.2 million acres of bays and sounds. There are two distinct regions along the Louisiana coast: the Mississippi Deltaic Plain of central and eastern portion and the Chenier Plain of the western portion.Both of these regions have been developed over the past 5,000 years by a series of deltas built by the Lower Mississippi River.

The Causes

Wetlands loss in coastal Louisiana results from a combination of natural and man-made impacts.

Natural loss occurs when wetlands sink and erode after active delta building ceases. The erosion of barrier islands and widening of tidal passes also leads to increased wetland loss.

Man has increased the rate of wetlands loss through many of his activities. The construction of the massive Mississippi River and tributaries project, involving the construction of federally financed mainline Mississippi River levees and upstream diversions and flood control reservoirs, has prevented overbank spring flooding along the lower Mississippi River. Natural overflow is nature's tool in building the delta, the depository of bits and pieces of North America carried from the river's source, its tributaries, on down to its mouth.

As a result of levees (essential to the protection of river cities), most of the marsh building sediments are now being carried into the deeper waters of the Gulf of Mexico. This waste of sediment has, except in Atchafalaya Bay, prevented large scale building of new delta marsh that would help offset the rapid rate of wetland loss. It has also hastened the breakdown of existing marshes.

Another major cause of wetland loss is canal dredging and disposal of the dredged material or spoil. A report published in 1973 by Dr. Sherwood Gagliano indicated that dredging associated with oil and gas exploration and production accounted for nearly 25 percent of the total land loss in coastal Louisiana.

Drainage of marshes and swamps for agricultural or urban development is also a factor.

Salt water intrusion, another major cause of wetlands deterioration, has been accelerated by the digging of large federally funded navigation canals. An example is the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, a channel 36 feet deep by 500 feet wide extending for 78 miles from New Orleans to the Gulf beyond the Chandeleur Islands.

Following the initial digging of this waterway in the late 1950's and early 1960's, water salinity tripled in the St. Bernard Parish wetlands. Large expanses of cypress trees killed by the influx of salt water in the Chalmette-Violet area serve as a memorial to the once thriving cypress swamps.

Salt water intrusion is also largely responsible for the loss in 1978 of the 20,000 acres of fresh marsh that were present in St. Bernard Parish in the mid-1950's, and the loss of 215,000 acres of fresh marsh in the Barataria Basin during the same period. Other major navigation channels which have contributed greatly to salt water intrusion include the Barataria Bay Waterway, the Houma Navigation Canal, and the Calcasieu Ship-Channel.

The Loss is More Than Land

Louisiana's rich coastal fisheries are largely dependent on the coastal marshes. Extensive research, much of it conducted by biologists with the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Louisiana State University, has shown that our wetlands provide vital nursery habitat for shrimp, crabs, and fish which spend all or part of their life cycle in Louisiana's estuaries.

In recent years, shrimp and menhaden have accounted for more than 95 percent of the total poundage of commercial fish and shellfish landed in Louisiana. Scientists have presented evidence that both shrimp and menhaden are being harvested at or near full capacity or "maximum sustainable yield".

For instance, despite a fairly stable commercial shrimp harvest in Louisiana since 1940, the yearly catch of shrimp per licensed trawl has declined by nearly 90 percent since that time. Dr. Eugene Turner of Louisiana State University has recently reported that Louisiana's inshore shrimp catch is directly proportional to acreage of intertidal vegetation (primarily marsh), and that wetlands loss has a direct negative impact on fisheries.

Thousands of trappers depend on the marsh for their livelihood. Many of the state's 130,000 waterfowlers utilize it for sport. Louisiana's coastal wetlands support tremendous nutria and muskrat populations and harvest of these pelts contributes to the state's status as leading fur-producer in North America.

In other words, shrimp production is dependent on the marsh, and the loss of marsh reduces that production. Therefore, the future of Louisiana's rich coastal fisheries appears to be in grave danger with continued rapid loss of its coastal marshes.

Wildlife also faces serious habitat-decline as a result of continued marsh loss and salt water intrusion. For the millions of migratory waterfowl that winter in Louisiana, the rapid conversion of fresh water marshes to open water, non-wetlands, or more saline marsh types will be especially severe.

Department of Wildlife and Fisheries biologists have found that the fresh and low salinity (intermediate) marshes winter almost twice as many puddle ducks (mallards, teal, pintail, etc.) as do brackish and salt marshes. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists have estimated that the deficit in the supply of waterfowl hunting will exceed 336,000 recreation days by the year 2000. In other words, the marsh remaining then will not nearly support the number of hunters

who will want to hunt at that time. Habitat for other marsh birds such as rails, gallinules, coots, and wading birds will also be reduced by continued wetland deterioration.

Louisiana's fur production is also threatened by rapid wetlands loss, especially in the fresh water marshes. Nutria comprise over two-thirds of Louisiana's fur harvest and nutria harvest is highest in fresh marsh, lowest in salt marsh. Alligators also reach their greatest numbers in the fresh and intermediate marshes. Therefore, continued marsh acreage declines are expected to result in reduced populations of fur animals and alligators, especially as land loss and salt water intrusion reduce fresh water marsh acreage.

There is a crisis in our coastal marsh.

Some Possible Solutions

The primary means of reducing the loss of Louisiana's coastal marshes involves diversion of Mississippi and Atchafalaya River water into adjacent wetlands to reduce salt water intrusion and create new marsh. In diverting fresh water to reduce salt water intrusion, gates must be placed in the levees of the Mississippi or Atchafalaya Rivers so that controlled amounts of fresh water can be diverted to adjacent marshes and bays during periods of high river levels.

Although such projects are not designed to build new marsh, biologists believe that the nutrients and limited amounts of sediments carried into the marshes by the diverted water would reduce the present rate of loss. With projects designed to create new marsh, large volumes of Mississippi River water would be diverted into shallow protected waters, probably near the mouth of the Mississippi River. Marsh building sites could be located so that effects on oyster producing areas are minimized.

Louisiana's multi-million dollar shrimp industry depends on estuaries which serve as nursery grounds for shrimp as well as oysters, crabs, and fish. Louisiana leads the nation in commercial fishery landings with a harvest of nearly 1.7 billion pounds worth over $190 million recorded during 1978.

Several federal water resource studies being carried out under the leadership of the U. S.Army Corps of Engineers offer promise for large-scale fresh water diversion into the marshes. It is quite possible that these studies will conclude with recommendations for construction of fresh water diversion projects. Such projects would help to offset adverse effects on Louisiana's wetlands brought about by the construction of levees along the lower Mississippi River and the excavation of federally funded navigation channels.

The Louisiana legislature has already recognized the need to restore and enhance the wetlands of Louisiana's coastal zone. In 1979, it enacted legislation directing the preparation of a fresh water diversion plan for the state. Work is underway on that plan, under the supervision of the coastal management section of the Department of Natural Resources.

Most important of all, the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Department of Natural Resources, and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service must and will continue to work hand in hand to develop a restoration program for Louisiana's coastal wetlands.

It is clear that the important fish and wildlife resources of coastal Louisiana are threatened by continued rapid degradation of its marshes and swamps. This problem is widely recognized by natural resource managers, scientists, trappers, hunters, sportsmen, and other members of the public.

Sound measures are available to at least reduce this loss. However, firm action must be taken to implement these measures at the earliest possible date.

Without such action, an important part of this nation's fish and wildlife heritage will be lost forever.

Lloyd Poissenot

BACK YARD BASS BONANZA

By Paul Kalman

In no way does Joey Buck resemble the average bass fisherman.

He does not hold membership in any bass club nor is he a walking billboard who wears a nylon jacket emblazoned with colorful patches identifying him as a user or "field tester" of certain types of fishing tackle.

His tackle box is a small paper grocery bag containing a few plastic worms, spare hooks, and bullet sinkers.

To make matters even more unique, he has never owned a bass boat nor does he fish from that of any friend. His favored and only method is to cast from the bank.

Said banks are those lining the lagoons of New Orleans City Park from which the diminutive 72-year-old angler has extracted more than 100 bass weighing in excess of five pounds apiece.

"If I kept accurate count," he smiles, "it would probably top 150."

Whatever his estimate, there's little doubt that Joey Buck ranks exceedingly high among the select inner circle of Louisiana anglers who specialize in catching lunker bass. The fact that he caught every one of his fish in City Park places him in a category that few, if any, Pelican State bass fishermen can hope to match.

Joey's love affair with City Park began in 1938 when he moved to New Orleans from Chicago where he played accordian with some of the nation's most famous bands. He had done a bit of fishing in Lake Michigan and a few other

Lloyd Poissenot

Joey Buck, New Orleans City Park bass fisherman, recognizes that the best things in life are often found right at home.

spots within easy driving distance of the Windy City, but such activity was limited to the summer months when there was always too much competition from vacationers.

Purchasing a home on DeSaix Boulevard within walking distance of City Park, he discovered, quite by accident, that the lagoons were loaded with king-sized bass.

He recalls gleefully that his very first cast yielded a largemouth that tipped the scales at almost six pounds.

"I was so flabbergasted," he confesses, "that I had it mounted."

In subsequent years, Joey had so many monster mounts that they were hanging in the living room, kitchen, and bedroom. Mrs. Buck finally had to blow the whistle.

"She announced one day," he said, "that the fish had to go or she was kicking me out of the house. I gave all but the biggest to friends including one I shipped out-of-town in an old accordian case."

Joey freely admits that his job has given him an upper hand in catching so many big fish. In addition to playing at parties and wedding receptions, he operates a highly successful music school where students come mostly in the late afternoons and evenings. On many occasions, he can be seen fishing in coat and tie with his trouser legs rolled up to keep them from getting wet. He'll fish like this for a couple of hours and go to work.

"That's another big plus about fishing City Park," he continues. "The average bass fisherman spends a lot of time travelling. Also, the cost of gasoline for operating his car and boat has gone up so high that I don't know how many of those fellows can continue to operate. I drive anywhere I want in the park in five minutes, and can get from the park to my studio equally fast."

Joey's record catch of seven pounds two ounces was made in April 1968. This was the same year he was featured in an article written and illustrated by New Orleans Times-Picayune photographer Roy Blaum in that newspaper's Dixie Rotogravure Magazine.

On the first day Blaum started researching the story, Joey caught three five pounders in 40 minutes. Thereafter, Blaum followed Joey around like a puppy until he uncovered Joey's innermost angling secrets.

Blaum isn't the only beneficiary of Joey's expertise. He has coached countless youngsters in the rudiments of effective casting and learning to recognize the eccentricities of the wily black bass. In recent years, Joey's 14-year-old grandson has become his favorite student and fishing companion.

"Most people don't have the patience to catch big bass," Joey claims. "The first thing they must learn is to retrieve the lure slowly and study the waters for depth and spots where fish conceal themselves. City Park is loaded with ideal hiding places such as sunken cypress stumps, undercut banks, and partially submerged tree branches."

Many of the park's likely fishing spots cannot be approached because of vegetation growing along the banks, but this doesn't deter Joey who isn't particularly worried about losing a few lures. His favorite is the black plastic worm, his most consistent producer which, at today's inflated prices, still costs less than 15-cents.

"It accounts for 90 percent of my fish," Joey boasts, "and I don't plan to switch while I'm ahead."

Paul Kalman

Shreveport's Cross Lake, Monroe's Ouachita River and Bayou De Siard, Sibley Lake in Natchitoches, City Park and University Lakes in Baton Rouge... all are in-town fishable waterbodies. Cross Lake has a reputation as one of the best channel catfish hotspots in the south. But New Orleans City Park Lagoon has produced perhaps the most and the largest bass.

Joey has lost several giant fish that he knows weighed nine or 10 pounds. On several occasions, he has had five pounders break the line only to catch the same fish a day or two later with the original black plastic worm still hooked firmly in its jaw.

Although he is proficient with open-face casting reels and fly tackle, Joey fishes mostly with spinning gear which is easier to handle in heavy winds. Also, he doesn't have to worry about tangling the line with back casts like fly fishermen.

As is the case with most bass fishermen, Joey has no such thing as an "average" day. At times, he has caught—and released—more than 30 bass while on other occasions, he hasn't gotten a single strike. The latter instances, however, are extremely rare.

Joey wishes more people would fish City Park, believing that the harder a given body of productive water is fished, the better the quality of the catch.

He compares it with raising prize-winning roses.

"If you allow a rose bush to produce all the buds it possibly can, you end up with a bunch of runts. Pinch off all but a few of the prime buds and you produce true long-stemmed American Beauties."

This theory is backed up by fishery biologists who agree that over-population is a contributing element to the fact that so few lunker bass are taken from brackish waters in coastal Louisiana.

The attitude is also shared by Ellis Laborde who served as general manager of City Park prior to his retirement two years ago. Laborde is something of a walking encyclopedia about City Park and certainly its most learned source of wisdom concerning the park's fabulous bass fishing.

According to Laborde, the park's original lagoon running parallel to City Park Avenue was part of old Bayou Metairie, a sluggish stream that started in the swamps of Metairie Ridge and emptied in Bayou St. John which, in turn, feeds into Lake Pontchartrain.

During the Depression, the Works Progress Administration contracted with the Chicago planning firm of Bennett and Frost to design a complete lagoon system for City Park. Between 1937 and 1941, approximately 85 percent of the existing lagoons were excavated, with much of the work done by hand. As many as 12,000 men were employed at one time under the supervision of the late J. Gilbert Scheib.

According to Laborde, there are 14 miles of shoreline embracing the lagoons within the park's 1,500-acres. This does not include Bayou St. John which also falls under the park's jurisdiction.

Paul Kalman

The largest recorded bass ever taken from New Orleans City Park was caught by Cecil Doiron, present manager of the park's boating and fishing concession. It weighed 8 pounds 1 ounce and naturally, he had it mounted.

Regarding fish other than bass, City Park anglers occasionally turn up with some eye-popping surprises. In 1970, a 16-year-old angler hooked and landed a 46-pound carp or buffalo. In 1974, Joe Giordano, a City Park plumber, was working on a conduit that allows water from Bayou St. John to enter the park's lagoons near the intersection of Mirabeau Avenue and Wisner Boulevard. According to Laborde, Giordano saw a huge catfish wedged in the iron grill used to keep logs and other flotsam from jamming the conduit.

"Joe called for his helper," Laborde said, "and they both jumped in the water. Joe hit the catfish with his shovel and they dragged it ashore. It weighed 42-pounds."

The largest recorded bass ever taken from City Park was caught on December 4, 1975 by Cecil Doiron, a former police officer who now manages the park's boating and fishing concession. It weighed 8 pounds 1 ounce and Doiron had it mounted.

Anyone is welcome to fish the park provided they purchase a one day permit for $1.50 from the concession office in the administration building. Yearly fishing permits are available for $50. There is a daily creel limit of three bass and the use of live bait is restricted to worms and crawfish. Live shrimp, shiners, goldfish, or other natural baits are prohibited.

Anglers are discouraged from fishing along the golf fairways and in the water traps on most of the park's four 18-hole golf courses.

Paul Kalman

Paul Kalman

The park does not permit any boats to be used for fishing. This restricts the water area that can be fished effectively to about 20 percent of the total lagoon area. Thus, bass have a huge space to feed and rest outside the casting range of even the most expert anglers.

Accurate casting is almost a must for successful fishing in the park. Joey Buck, for example, can knock the ashes off the end of a cigarette at 25 yards and toss plastic worms beneath overhanging tree branches with surprising ease.

From mid-February through early April, park authorities impose a closed season to permit the bass to spawn. At one time, many years ago, there was a similar closed season throughout Louisiana but it was eliminated when biologists noted that it was doing almost nothing to help the bass population. The exception in City Park arises from a combination of physical conditions and unscrupulous people. Spawning female bass create nests by using their tails to fan away silt from shell or gravel spots close to the shoreline. After the eggs are laid and fertilized, the female guards the nest by swimming slowly around or remaining almost motionless directly over it. It the clear shallows, they can be spotted quite easily using Polaroid glasses, and snagging the females is not difficult.

The time and length of the spawning season is determined largely by water temperatures, with some bass spawning before Christmas and others waiting until mid-May. It is therefore impossible to reach an optimum in deciding the dates for the closed season but February/April is considered best.

Paul Kalman

Paul Kalman

The New Orleans City Park "Big Bass Rodeo" is one of the oldest freshwater competitions in the U.S.

Paul Kalman

In Louisiana, it is not necessary to own a bass boat, travel long distance, or utilize fancy electronic equipment to catch fish. Backyard inner city lakes yield bass, white perch, bluegill, and other freshwater species to the zealous bank fisherman.

Since 1946, the park's fishing season has opened with a "Big Bass Rodeo" originated by the old New Orleans Item newspaper and subsequently co-sponsored The Times-Picayune/States-Item as a public service in cooperation with the park's board of commissioners.

At age 35, the rodeo is believed to be the oldest fresh water fishing competition in the U.S.

This contest takes place on a Saturday morning before Easter and attracts upwards of 1,000 participants. There is no entry fee but everyone is required to purchase a park fishing permit and fill out a registration form listing one of three divisions in which the angler will fish. The choice between plug casting, fly casting, and spinning must be indicated and roughly 65 percent of the entrants choose the latter category. At least half the entrants are youngsters, some accompanied by sleepy-eyed parents who spend the morning snoozing under a convenient tree.

Although the rodeo does not begin until dawn when skyrockets signal the official opening, entrants start lining up at the fishing concession window shortly after midnight and a few hardy souls have spent the night waiting in sleeping bags.

Cash prizes are purposely kept modest to discourage cheating but there have been cases where "ancient" bass with white gills and faded eyes have been entered. Ringers like these are easily spotted by the veteran judges and weighmasters including this writer who founded the rodeo immediately after World War II and serves as the perennial general chairman. Our original committee included the late Clint Bridgeman, a founder of the New Orleans Sportsmen's League; the late Eddie Fayard, Sr., a legendary angler and professional bass bug manufacturer, and the late Ralph Brysson. Besides me, Harry Carver is the sole remaining survivor of our original rodeo committee and he continues active with Philip Jaeger, Lionel Favret, Webb Purvis, and Eddie Bellevue, Jr. Until last year, Bellevue was the park's fishing and boating concessionaire.

Lest any readers of this article come away with the thought that only New Orleans citizens can imbibe of the pleasures of City Park's marvelous bass fishing, it should be explained that more than 50 percent of the park's patrons live outside Orleans Parish, some travelling as far distant as Baton Rouge, Hammond, Lafayette, Covington, and points south to Grand Isle.

As Joey Buck observes, "Many people think nothing of driving more than 200 miles to Toledo Bend while others go fishing all the way to Florida. For most, the bass they catch are no bigger than those found right in City Park. Often they are much smaller.

"I'm perfectly content to continue my old pattern of walking the shores, fishing the black worm, and taking my share of lunkers. I've seen enough of the country to recognize that the best things in life are often found right at home."

Regardless of whether you refer to them as earthworms, red wrigglers, nightcrawlers, Canadian flattails, or a variety of other aliases, most fishermen agree that the only reason Mother Nature created worms in the first place is because they make great...

Wiggly Li'l Fishin' Critters

By Frank Davis
Photography by Lloyd Poissenot

If you physically had to sit down and count single models of every available artificial fishing lure on the market today, you'd end up with a figure closely approaching the National Debt. Saltwater lures, freshwater lures, deep-running lures, shallow-water lures... lures for topwater, green ones, pink ones, purple ones, blue ones... lures with sparkles, lures with stripes, plugs, flies, jigs, bucktails, fish-type, squid-type, bug-type... solid colors, multi-colors, weird colors, common-colors. The list is endless and the selection is incomprehensible.

Nightcrawlers and redworms (inset) are two of the more popular, hardy freshwater fish baits.

Fortunately, though, Mother Nature kept her choice of critters to catch fish rather basic—*little fish, crickets,* and *worms.* Everything deviating is lagniappe. And according to national statistics, especially in freshwater sportsfishing, 'dem li'l worms seem to be head-and-shoulders above their natural competitors.

"Hundreds and hundreds of thousands of worms are sold to anglers every year," Ron M. Manning, owner of Jackson Wholesale Bait Company in Jackson, Mississippi, told me during an interview recently, "and numbers continue to increase every year. At just my company alone—and we distribute to a large portion of the southern United States—we ship bait shops and tackle dealers approximately 10 million nightcrawlers, three-to-five million giant jumpers, five-to-six million redworms, and all sorts of other hybrid worms. That's lots of fish bait, m'friend!"

Of course, earthworm fishing is nothing new. Anthropologists maintain that possibly the caveman, when he shaped hooks out of bone fragments, baited his hooks with worms. Virtually every historic account of fishing, including Norman Rockwell's "little boy" paintings, involve worm fishing. Even today's angler spends hours manufacturing (or buying in bulk) plastic facsimiles of worms. Moreover, in nature, the snapping turtle's pink wiggling tongue and the angler fish's worm-like skull appendage are organs that look like worms to lure fish.

Yet like everything else in modern society, scientific advancements have given the fisherman what could be referred to as the so-called "better worm." Only rarely today do folks who plan fishing trips spend any time digging up earthworms for bait. It's much simpler to stop off at a bait shop and buy a carton of pre-packaged, scoured, and toughened nightcrawlers of the new-and-improved variety. They are livelier, fatter, and more effective than the typical garden variety.

"See—the worms you buy in the fishing cups aren't common earthworms," Manning explains. "I mean, the worms fishermen use aren't dug up by folks from under felled trees and then sold to dealers and distributors. They're specialty products raised for a demanding market. Some come from Canada, where pickers might make as much as $250 a night collecting them from cultivated soils. Some come from Florida's panhandle, where they are hybridized to ensure they jump around on the hook. They come from breeders and farms—and it's big business. And it's only for fishin'!"

Pre-packaged, lively nightcrawlers sold at bait shops are specially raised on farms.

Manning detailed the popularity of the top three fishing worms (those found in bait shop cups) and talked about their use in freshwater.

"I guess that at the top of the list would be the cool cat nightcrawlers," he said. "Technically, these are Canadian flattails and they are picked from the wild by wormpickers with flashlights at night. Various other species of nightcrawlers are also commercially picked in North Carolina and Ohio, and fishermen like them because they're usually a bigger worm and pretty hardy on the hook.

"Another species called the giant jumpers are really popular too, but since they're more expensive than redworms we don't sell as many to fishermen as we do redworms. But these wiggly little fishin' critters are something else—the minute they hit the water, they start gyrating and twisting and jerking about. These are Florida worms, but most of the supply passing through my distributorship originates at Four-R Worm Farm in Slocomb, Alabama.

"And then there are the regular redworms, which are probably the most common variety fishermen count on for catching sac-a-lait and bream. The only problem with redworms is their size—they're skinny and you usually have to use two or three on a hook at the same time. From a biological point of view, however, they do catch fish and they're probably the best ones to use for panfishing."

Manning's explanations stopped during my interview, just long enough to allow a bit of digression. So my questioning went back to common garden worms.

"Ron—do I understand that everyday, ordinary, garden-variety earthworms aren't the best ones for bait?"

"Oh, sure, you can catch fish with them," he replied, "but they haven't the qualities you want in a good fishing worm. If you have a rich compost pile, for example, and you want to dig up a batch fresh—and you must dig them up right before you go fishing or they'll die quickly—then go ahead... dig some up. But if you're looking for a hardy worm that's gonna give you a lot of action, gonna stay alive a long time on the hook, one that's tough—and remember, they're scoured to make them tough—then you should buy nightcrawlers, or redworms, or flattails. Because they're treated to be fishing worms. And make no mistake about it, dollar for dollar you'll catch more fish with worms than with any other kind of bait!"

I started to change the questioning, but Manning quickly expounded on this train of thought.

"Here's something else you should know—for instance, you buy a couple cups of worms, go fishing, and you don't use them all. Well, don't throw them away! Lots of folks do, you know. They think they won't keep. But that's not true.

"The Canadian flattail, packed in the peat mixture you buy them in, can be put in the refigerator for several weeks and stay healthy and active. Further, redworms and the giant jumpers will keep three weeks in a shady, cool spot. Compare that to common garden varieties, and if they make it two days you're fortunate!"

Raising your own worms is a highly touted pastime, the evidence of which can be found in advertisements listed in virtually every sports magazine. Manning, however, advocated caution in the so-called "raising-worms-for-fun-and-profit" gambit.

"I really hate to see people taken in by this hoopla on raising their own worms," he explained, "because it really isn't as simple as it sounds. I'm forever getting phone calls and letters from folks whose worm-raising projects have just plain bombed.

"You've got to know something about worms to make worm-raising easy, whether you raise them for fish-bait on a personal basis or for mass numbers. And I'm here to tell you that unless you have a lot of time, the right equipment, and enough money to make a substantial investment in the stock...you can forget it!

"Now I'm not saying this, as some folks would suggest, because I distribute worms and don't want competition. Listen, I buy worms from distributors and farms and raisers, and I'd buy a lot more from folks individually if they could get them raised. But they can't! It's not that easy! My suppliers are big farms because they've got the bucks invested in the right equipment, and quite technical equipment, too, I might add. And it takes work to raise enough worms to make a profit."

I asked him to go further.

"Okay—speaking generally, it takes fishing worms just about 21 days to reproduce. After stocking fresh bedding, and that's stocking with good breeding worms, the egg cases show up in about nine days. Then it takes about 14 days for the capsules to hatch out producing an average of about seven worms per capsule, but sometimes as many as 22.

"Now they have to be fed, they have to be temperature controlled, they must be kept moist, and to do this they have to be housed indoors with a bright light over them all the time so that they stay in the dirt.

"I remember several occasions when the electrical power in our stockrooms was interrupted and the lights went out—man, we picked worms off the walls, ceilings, floors everywhere for days! They all climbed out of the boxes and roamed around in the dark. It was a mess!"

"Well what about the folks who raise worms outside," I inquired.

"Most often they end up with a flat full of dead worms, that's what happens. They either dry out and die or they escape from the trays. It's difficult to raise worms successfully outdoors. Oh—and thunder and lightning? Worms are scared of it. They're affected by it. Let a good electrical storm move into an area and it's bye-bye worms—I don't care what kind of a top you have on the flat... there won't be a worm around after the storm ends. They're strange critters, I tell ya'!"

Manning did suggest, however, that if sportsmen wanted to try raising a worm bed for personal use (indoors, of course), they avoid buying the "package deals" offered in the various publications. He said that in a three-foot by eight-foot bed (about 12 inches high), composed of approximately $10 worth of lumber and $10 worth of peat moss, and stocked with $25 worth of breeder redworms (the cost of one pound), you could have all the makings of a $500 "package deal" so often advertised.

"All you have to do then is keep them out of the weather, feed them on a predetermined basis using the formulas found in most biology books, and keep a light over them and you'll probably have a good enough supply to take care of your individual fishing needs. That's provided, of course, you don't fish all that often."

Admittedly a worm fisherman, Ron refused to let us leave his building in Jackson without offering a few fishing tips.

"I don't care if you fish for catfish, bluegills, white perch, bass, whatever ...nothing beats these critters. I mean, worms are the number one bait! But you've got to hook them right.

"Don't string up a worm on your hook—I've seen some folks insert hooks right down the middle of the rascals till they were identical to the shape of the hook. You sure won't get much fishing action that way. Best thing to do with small worms is put several on the hook at the same time—three, say—and hook them crossways only once so that there's a whole lot of wiggling going on!

"The bigger worms I suggest you hook twice—once in the front and once at the tail, but never in the breeder collar, the yellow band around the worm. You're using natural bait for action, remember, so don't defeat your entire purpose.

"And for really big worms, like Cool Cats, I recommend you rig them for the kind of fishing you're doing. For instance, for bass you can Texas rig 'em weedless (just like you would a plastic worm) and fish them whole. Lots of folks I deal with fish this way, and that big ol' live worm does all the action for them. For fish like white perch or bream, you can use small pieces of the worm and sometimes catch as many as a dozen fish on just one. The critters are tough, so you should have no trouble using them over again a couple of times."

Manning had whetted my appetite. After six hours of nothing but conversation on worms I was ready to launch the boat. I had seen more worms in one place in the last half-day than I imagined there even existed. So I asked the obvious angler's question.

"So, Ron, when are you taking me to some of your secret spots?"

"Heck—anytime you're ready, m'friend. But I guarantee you're gonna fish with worms!"

Hook worms crosswise (above) only once to make them wiggle or rig them weedless (below).

SCIENCE BY THE SEA

By Julia Murchison McSherry
Photography by Lloyd Poissenot

The Grand Terre Marine Laboratory is a unique research facility providing an essential service to Louisiana's vast seafood industry.

The day begins early, with the alarm sounding at 5:00 a.m., breakfast served at 6:00, the biologists often out in the elements long before sunrise.

A marine biologist's world has no room for typical nine to five office routine. And the world at the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries marine laboratory research facility on Grand Terre is a special one.

A marine lab biologist's day starts early, runs hard and long for five (sometimes seven) straight days a week. There's no going home, except on weekends.

"Home" for eleven biologists Monday through Friday is a modest but comfortable dormitory on an island void of outside civilization. The only things there are an old deserted fort, grazing cattle, an abundance of shorebirds, some wildlife, and the self-sufficient research operation. The lab utilizes and monitors the vast available marine resources in Barataria Bay and the Gulf of Mexico.

Grand Terre is situated in a veritable paradise of marine life off the coast of southeast Louisiana about fifty miles west of where the Mississippi River churns its silted waters into the Gulf. Marine life here is so abundant, it supplies a good portion of our nation's seafood and because it is a renewable resource, it is the lifeblood of local fishermen and industries who reap their harvest from the sea.

Closest human life is several miles away by water on the popular fishing resort island, Grand Isle. Others live "up the bayou", along Hwy. 1 in towns like Golden Meadow, Galliano, and LaRose. These small settlements, dependent on the Gulf's resources (shrimp, oysters, seafood, and the oil industry) are nestled border to border along southeast Louisiana's main artery, Bayou LaFourche. Closest city to Grand Terre is New Orleans, forty-five miles as the crow flies but a hundred by road.

Each biologist assigned to the lab is charged with specific research projects important to the future of our rich Gulf resources. Duties vary: there's field work, long hours of tagging fish, dealing with instruments monitoring the environment, trawl samples, and fish pond seining, to name a few. There are plenty of twelve hour days when the thermometer approaches 100 degrees; there are cold, blustering winter mornings afield; there are hurricanes and storms to contend with and blinding fogs. A biologist's job is not always easy.

There's plenty of laboratory work too, weighing and measuring of fish, counting of shrimp, compilation of data. There's indoor desk work: writing project reports and research papers to be published in scientific journals.

But the field, laboratory, and scientific work pays for itself: it slowly but constantly keeps a check on and improves Louisiana's multi-million dollar seafood industry.

Primary function of the lab when it was initially established by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries was to monitor and help improve the shrimp and oyster industries. Back in 1960-61, when the present facilities were first built, the lab boasted one of the first shrimp pond cultures on the Gulf Coast. Studies have since expanded to include numerous other species from menhaden, a multi-million dollar commercial species, to redfish and speckled trout, popular gamefish, and others too.

Ron Dugas, director of the marine lab for the past four years, explains it like this. "Louisiana out-produces all other states in poundage of marine products so we *need* technology and research to manage the resources, to protect people who have large investments in the industry, to better the products, and to preserve the resource for future generations."

The state's vast fisheries program does not just sail along smoothly by itself. Someone must regulate harvest, set seasons, deal with problems on a daily basis to ascertain that the resource is maintained. And that's exactly what the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries does; the marine lab is one of its arms in fulfulling this role.

Chief function of the lab today is as a total marine research facility. Biologists there conduct long-range investigations, short-range studies and field examinations to supply the wildlife and fisheries commission data utilized in formulating rules, regulations, and policy.

Biologists monitor shrimp breeding, growth, movement, and effects of salinity and temperature. They seek ways to better production and quality of oysters and they provide an extension type service to individual oyster growers.

They are responsible for development and management of natural state seed grounds and oyster reservations which are managed to achieve maximum production. Supplemental seed oyster production is a major project and is accomplished by shell plantings, dumping large loads of shells into suitable bays. The shells serve as "cultch" to which oysters attach themselves to grow to maturity. Biologists are responsible for educational programs, pollution studies, preparation of scientific papers, and activities with inter-state and national committees.

Besides marine biologists who conduct the research, the lab also maintains a vital support crew of boat captains, biological aides, carpenters, cooks, and secretaries with many employees doing double duties in more than one job capacity.

For instance, Theard Rigaud, carpenter by trade, is hired officially as boat captain but in addition to duties assigned to that position, he also serves as cook.

Rigaud, who has worked at the lab for twenty-five years, remembers the days in the '50s when research was conducted off an old barge and wooden lighthouse immediately adjacent to Fort Livingston. Built in the 1850s before the British invasion but never manned, the old fort was intended to protect Barataria Pass.

It still stands in part and it is an interesting visit in itself to see the structurally sound ancient brick walls fortified with clam shells. In fact, it is an architectural superstructure now, not to mention that it was built in the days when bricks were fired individually and transported by schooner probably from the northern shores of Lake Pontchartrain near Mandeville. The lighthouse has long been torn down and the barges removed.

Rigaud remembers when kerosene lanterns were shone from the top of the lighthouse by the lone keeper who lived there. He also recalls when Hurricane Betsy severely damaged the lab in 1965. And he was one of the primary builders of the new facility in the early '60s.

"He knows where everything is and how it got there. Any time there's a problem or a major repair, Rigaud knows how to remedy the situation . . . we've got to keep him around," Ron Dugas laughingly asserts. And he means it.

Total lab staff at present is seventeen and each member can proudly boast that through their efforts the lab is totally self-sufficient. Facilities include a well-equipped chemistry and bacteriology laboratory, fish holding tanks, sixteen one-fourth acre ponds with pumps, boats, docks, plus dormitory housing for personnel and visiting research scientists. The staff works, eats, and sleeps in the same facility. Most repairs and all maintenance is done by employees with lab equipment. The lab even has its own water supply system.

Touring school groups are welcome at the lab as long as arrangements are made in advance through the New Orleans office seafood division and as long as the tours don't interfere with research activities. Complete tour of the facilities includes a slide presentation on research projects.

The Grand Terre Marine Lab provides an essential service to Louisiana's vast seafood industry.

John Roussel points out some of the many marine specimens on display at the lab.

"I don't want to fool you, I hire only the best," insists Ron Dugas, director of the Grand Terre Marine Lab. He refers to his staff of eleven biologists plus support crew of boat captains, biological aides, carpenters, cooks, and secretaries.

Mark Chatry examines plankton samples taken in the passes to count post larval shrimp. (Upper left)

Richard Bejarano (left) and John Roussel weigh, measure, and record data on fish taken in trawl samples. (Upper right)

Tim Killeen, biologist (left), and Irving "Rufus" Pierce, boat captain, run a test trawl to collect shrimp and fish samples which will be taken back to the lab where growth rates and environmental conditions in the bay are recorded. Biologists constantly monitor Barataria Bay, at least weekly year round and more frequently immediately prior to shrimp season. (above)

"Butler plates", oyster spat catching devices, are placed in lower Barataria Bay and checked weekly for recently set oysters and environmental conditions to determine the relationship between oysters setting and environmental influences. The checks are made every Wednesday no matter what the weather, rain, sleet, or cold.

"Last winter, Wednesday was traditionally the worst weather of the week," Charlie Dugas laughingly remarks.

The stone crab, could it make a new fishery? Charles Dugas tags one as part of a study to estimate populations to determine if Louisiana could potentially develop a new fishery. Stone crab traps are placed throughout the bay and checked twice a week. Though not as common as the blue crab in our state, the stone crab may be plentiful enough to support an industry. In some states, such as Florida, the sweet tasting meat is considered a delicacy. Only the claws are eaten and these can be regenerated.

Theard Rigaud, a carpenter by trade, doubles as part-time cook at the marine lab. The kitchen helps keep the facility a self-sufficient operation: biologists study, sample, record data, and compile scientific papers in the same complex where they eat and sleep.

After hours, biologists may watch the week-night movie, but during the day (and often into the night), they watch a different kind of "tube". Here, Charles Dugas monitors drumfish predation on oyster beds in a holding tank. Through the use of underwater cameras, this video playback machine, and a tape recorder, he can experiment with various noises in an effort to find a way of keeping the oyster-loving fish off the beds.

Drum fish predation is a problem to oyster fishermen who lose oysters soon after bedding. In a single feeding, a drum fish will eat one oyster per pound of body weight.

Biologist Steve Hein (far left) closely monitors the number of eggs, nests, and brown pelicans on Queen Bess island across the pass from Grand Terre. Queen Bess is a natural bird sanctuary and an official one since 1912 when the legislature proclaimed it as such to protect birds from plume hunters. The brown pelican, once seen by the thousands along the coast, is now endangered but is making a comeback on Queen Bess with over 200 nests counted this spring.

"That's what's so rewarding about a project, when you can see tangible results," claims Ron Dugas of the 700 plus brown pelicans now inhabiting the island.

Sandpipers

Black skimmer

Wood stork

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

by David E. John
Photography by Lloyd Poissenot

Cardinal, male

OK all you outdoor people, bird watchers and feather fanciers, the time has come to see how well you *really* know your birds. This is a quiz about the other names, the aliases, that have been locally given to selected birds, colorful names like "man-o'-war-bird" and "sea dog", descriptive names like "monkey-face" and "butcher bird," Cajun names like *grand plongeon* and *sac-à-plomb*.

So sharpen your pencils, sit down and gear up for this grueling test of avian nicknames. Only one answer is correct for each number. It starts out easy but gets tougher as it goes.

Cardinal, female

1. Poule d'eau
a. teal
b. coot
c. loon

2. Honker
a. mallard
b. tree duck
c. Canada goose

3. French duck
a. shoveler
b. teal
c. mallard

4. Marsh hen
a. rail
b. quail
c. coot

5. Summer mallard
a. mallard
b. mottled
c. pintail

6. Dos-gris
a. mallard
b. ring-necked
c. scaup

7. Gros-bec
a. canvasback
b. night heron
c. barn owl

8. Smiling mallard
a. shoveler
b. mallard hen
c. redhead

9. Gray duck
a. pintail
b. gadwall
c. wigeon

10. Hell-diver
a. grebe
b. brown pelican
c. bufflehead

11. Redbird
a. roseate spoonbill
b. cardinal
c. purple martin

12. Blue-bill
a. stork
b. scaup
c. cuckoo

13. Bull-bat
a. big brown bat
b. red-tailed hawk
c. nighthawk

14.Rain crow
a. fish crow
b. cuckoo
c. pileated woodpecker

15. Mexican squealer
a. fulvous tree duck
b. groove-billed ani
c. kingfisher

That's about enough of the easy ones—now let's see who really knows their bird lingo…

16. Becasse
a. sandpiper
b. woodcock
c. rail

17. Blackjack
a. common crow
b. lesser scaup
c. male ring-necked duck

18. Sac-à-plomb
a. grebe
b. coot
c. merganzer

19. Gourdhead
a. turkey vulture
b. wood stork
c. cormorant

20. Duck hawk
a. merganzer
b. American eagle
c. peregrine falcon

21. Goatsucker
a. nighthawk
b. chimney swift
c. killdeer

22. Man-o'-war-bird
a. American eagle
b. Magnificent frigatebird
c. Wilson's storm petrel

23. Blue darter
a. Cooper's hawk
b. indigo bunting
c. least bittern

24. Papabotte
a. cattle egret
b. upland sandpiper
c. brown booby

25. Sea dog
a. Franklin gull
b. black skimmer
c. osprey

26. Log-god
a. rufous-sided towhee
b. chuck will's widow
c. pileated woodpecker

27. Bec-scie
a. merganzer
b. night heron
c. small sandpipers

28. Butcher bird
a. starling
b. roadrunner
c. loggerhead shrike

29. Stiff-tail
a. ruddy duck
b. scissor-tailed flycatcher
c. roadrunner

30. Peep
a. any baby bird
b. any small sandpiper
c. young ibis

31. Chock
a. boat-tailed grackle
b. red-winged blackbird
c. bufflehead

32. El Paisano
a. a friendly eagle
b. mockingbird
c. roadrunner

33. Vire-vire
a. vireo
b. chickadee
c. willet

34. Canard cheval
a. tufted titmouse
b. canvasback
c. bluejay

35. Grand plongeon
a. common loon
b. plover
c. magnificent frigatebird

36. Shipoke
a. green heron
b. flicker
c. herring gull

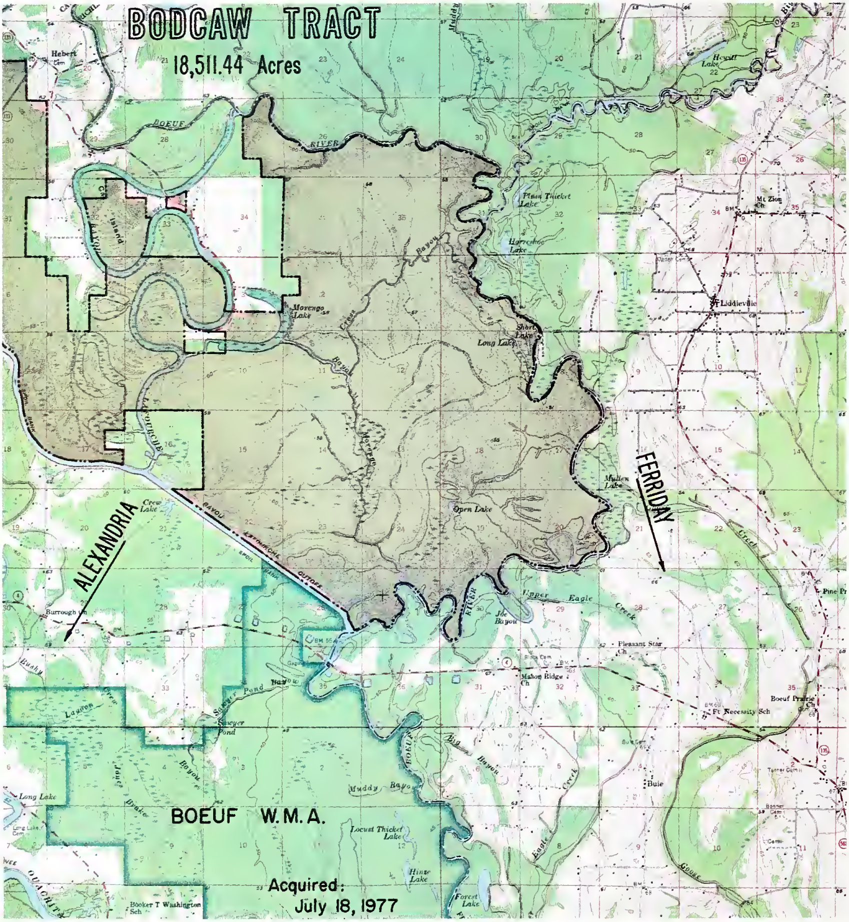
37. Flame bird
a. cardinal
b. roseate spoonbill
c. sandhill crane

38. Sun-gazer
a. royal tern
b. bittern
c. albatross

39. Monkey-face
a. wild turkey
b. wood stork
c. barn owl

40. Snake bird
a. anhinga
b. osprey
c. ruddy turnstone

(Answers page 29)



New Acres for Wildlife

Land Purchases and Donation Expand Wildlife Management Area System

By McFadden Duffy
Photography by Lloyd Poissenot

Two land purchases and donation of 4,158.71 acres to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries by the International Paper Company added 24,690 acres of prime wildlife land to the department's wildlife management area system in late January.

Announced jointly by Governor David C. Treen, Secretary Jesse J. Guidry and officials of the International Paper Company at a press conference in the capitol January 30, the transactions in Baton Rouge climaxed months of negotiations between the department and International Paper Company.

The purchase of 20,532.01 acres in Caldwell and Catahoula parishes for $10,030,000 marked the first permanent acquisition of land for outdoor recreational purposes under the Treen Administration, and signaled an acceleration of the department's acquisition program in the years immediately ahead.

The first purchase involved 18,511 acres of land in east central Caldwell Parish. This tract, known as the Bodcaw tract, was purchased from International Paper Company for $8,300,000. This area joins the department-owned Boeuf Wildlife Management Area and will be made a part of it, increasing the total size to 38,442 acres.

The new tract consists of bottomland hardwoods and is located in a general area of Louisiana where vast acreages of similar wildlife habitat are being converted to agriculture.

Game species found on the area include deer, quail, squirrel, swamp rabbit, woodcock and waterfowl. Other wildlife species are alligator, nutria, beaver, mink, otter, raccoon, possum, bobcat, fox and coyote.

In addition to the forest game and other wildlife, the lake borrow pits, canals, and bayous provide sport and commercial fishing opportunities.

Access to the area is provided by Louisiana Highways 133 and 848. In addition to these major vehicular routes, Boeuf River provides good boat access along the eastern boundary. A public boat ramp is located at the intersection of Boeuf River and Louisiana Highway 4.

This acquisition will preserve an important remnant tract of bottomland hardwoods for recreational use. Land use changes, such as agricultural, industrial, commercial, flood control, and transportation, have resulted in thousands of acres of similar habitat being lost each year.

Governor David C. Treen and Dewey Wills, game division assistant chief, announce the new land purchase at a press conference.

This area will be maintained and all wildlife species intensively managed to provide wildlife populations to help meet the demand for public hunting. Existing water bodies will be controlled and managed to provide the maximum amount of high quality fishing.

In addition, the area will be maintained and managed for many different types of outdoor recreation, including camping, nature photography, bird watching, and hiking.

The second purchase involved 2,020.57 acres in Catahoula Parish which was purchased from International Paper Company for $1,700,000.

At the time of purchase, International Paper Company donated an additional 4,158.71 acres of adjacent land to the department, bringing this new wildlife management area to 6,179.28 acres.

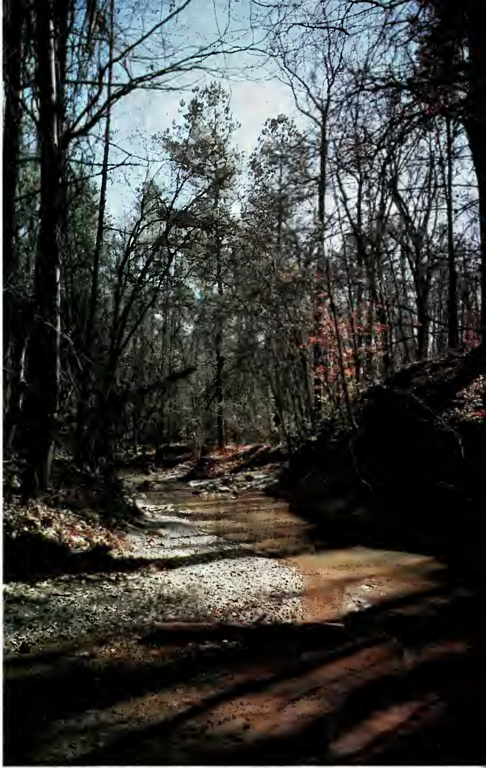
The tract, located in the northern portion of Catahoula Parish, is known locally as Sicily Island Hills. It consists of mixed pine bottomland timber and has elevations ranging from 50 to 200 feet.

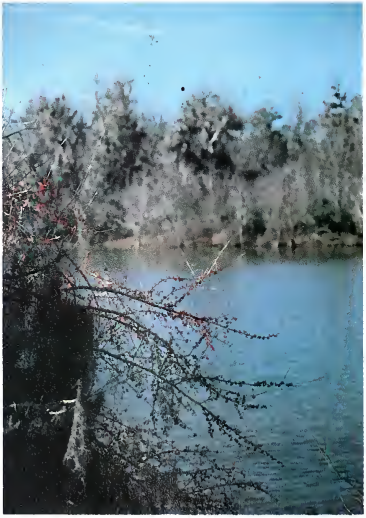
Game species found on the area include deer, fox and gray squirrel, cottontail and swamp rabbit, quail, woodcock, mourning dove and waterfowl. Other wildlife species are nutria, beaver, mink, otter, raccoon, possum, bobcat, fox and coyote. A variety of resident birdlife abounds on the area and numerous passerine species utilize the tract during migration.

In addition to the forest game and other wildlife, some sport fishing can be enjoyed in the major creeks on the tract.

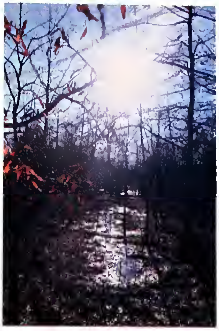
The newly acquired tract in Catahoula Parish will be known as the Sicily Island Hills Wildlife Management Area.

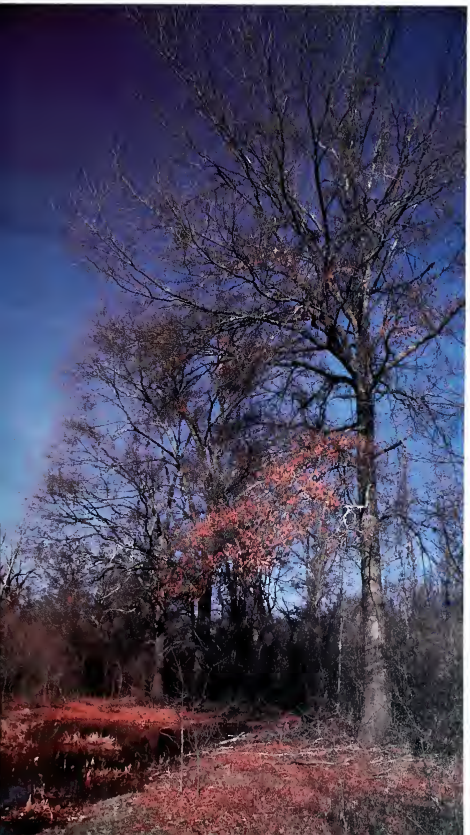
Governor Treen signs the act of sale for two new wildlife management tracts. Standing from left, James C. Farrelly, wildlife and fisheries commission member, Jesse J. Guidry, department secretary, J.C. Sonny Gilbert, commission chairman, Donald H. Powell, representing International Paper, and Jesse Knowles, commission member.

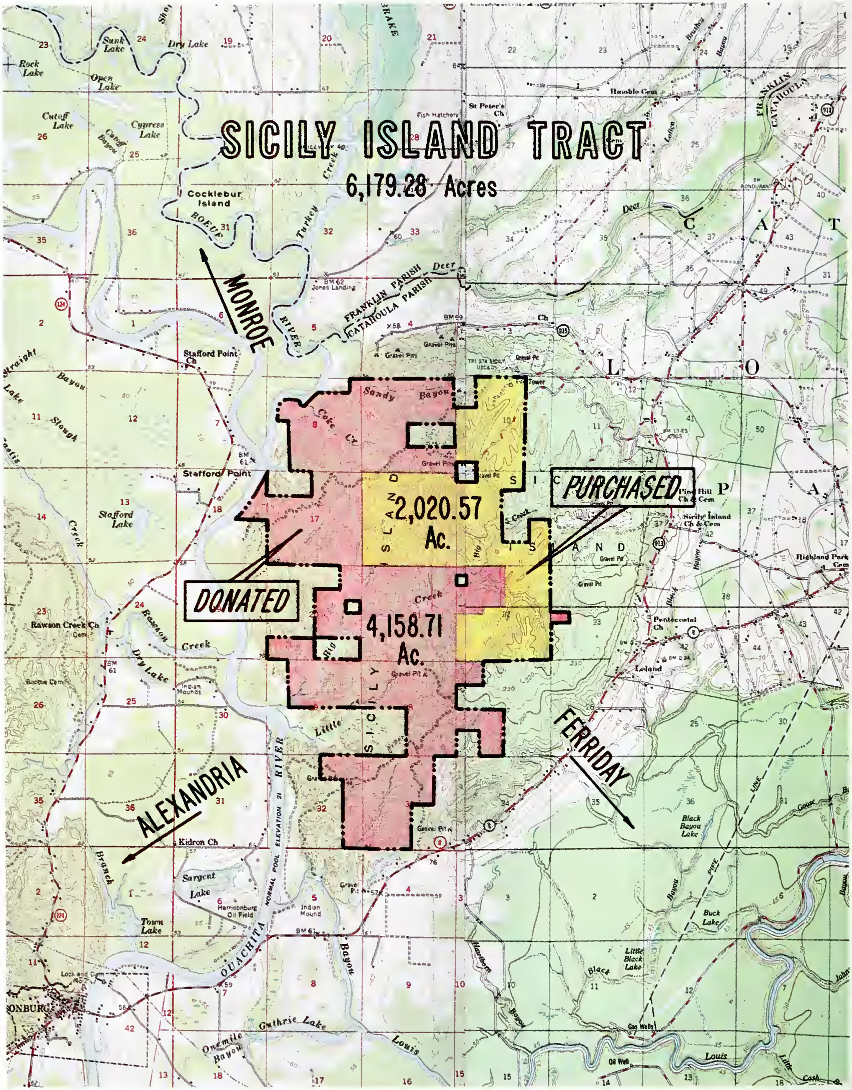




Bottomland hardwoods, piney hills, and meandering bayous provide ideal habitat for deer, squirrel, rabbit quail, and numerous other wildlife and bird species. Two new tracts of land in north central Louisiana ad over 26,000 acres to areas open for public hunting, fishing, and recreation.






SICILY ISLAND TRACT
6,179.28 Acres
MONROE
PURCHASED
2,020.57 Ac.
DONATED
4,158.71 Ac.
ALEXANDRIA
FERRIDAY
FRANKLIN PARISH
CATAHOULA PARISH
OUACHITA RIVER
SICILY ISLAND
Sicily Island Ch & Cem
Leland
Harrisonburg Oil Field

Conservationotes

The Swamp Iris

Each spring, splashes of pale blue-violet, lavender, and deep indigo grace the freshwater marshes, streams, and ponds of south Louisiana. The swamp iris, one of nature's harbingers of warm days to come, first wave their purple flags in early March soon after the last frost. They can be seen through April and on into May around blackberry pickin' time.

In fact, these beautiful wild flowers can be found growing in many of the same places as blackberries. Both plants proliferate best in very wet, marshy, hard-to-reach locations. To reach them, it is often necessary to wade through over-the-knee mud in hip boots. It is not uncommon to have to "scare a snake" with a stick in order to conquer these gems of nature so well protected in their natural habitat.

Many times irises can be seen along highway ditches, loaded also with crawfish, but can't be picked without great difficulty. This is just as well. For soon after being raked from their natural habitat, they die, particularly if not placed in water immediately.

Clair Brown, noted Louisiana botanist, includes two species of purple irises in his book Wildflowers of Louisiana: the Ziz-zag-stemmed Iris and the Giant-blue Iris.

One of the joys of Louisiana spring is the sight of clumps of swamp irises brightening the state's wetlands.

Kings are King

Last year was a record king mackerel year with eight of the top ten records broken between December 1979 and December 1980.

New number one fish caught in December 1980 by W. D. Lamb weighed 82 pounds. It replaced a 76 pound 12 ounce king caught by Robert T. Barnes in 1979 which had replaced the former record of 72 pounds caught by Roger Lee, Jr. in 1976. This means that in the period of one year, the first place record was broken twice with the 1980 record fish being ten pounds larger than the '76 fish.

In addition to the new record kings, an unusually large number of fish in the 68-72 pound category were reported to the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association official fish records committee.

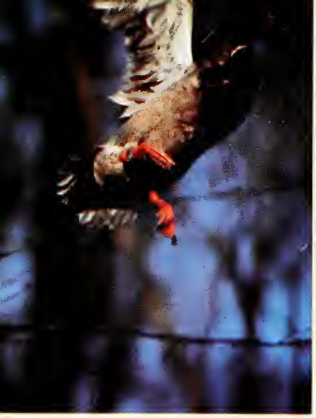
Some anglers attribute the record number of large fish to a change in fishing techniques and use of heavier tackle which insures the landing of heavier fish.

But many biologists and charter boat captains agree that the overall technique has not varied that much and that 1980 fishing conditions were ideal with plenty of feed and optimum salinity and oxygen content around the rigs where most of the fish were caught.

Simply stated there was just a tremendous run of kings and a movement of large ones in 1979-80.

Most of the record king mackerel caught in Gulf of Mexico waters off Louisiana's coast came from the Grand Isle and West Delta blocks. Most were caught drift fishing (one was hooked while trolling) and with the traditionally reliable white trout as bait.

So far in 1981, king fishing has been slow compared to the record year but anglers will continue to enthusiastically pursue the popular silver king.



Why Bird Banding?

Each year, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band large numbers of ducks, geese, and other birds. The banding program provides information about where birds are harvested, migration routes, regional differences in shooting pressure, vulnerability to shooting by age and sex classes, proportions of various populations harvested, age and sex composition of the population, annual and long-term survival rates.

The continental banding program is jointly administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service with support from state, provincial, and private organizations interested in waterfowl management.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife figures indicate about 8.3 million waterfowl have been banded and more than 1.3 million bands have been recovered and reported to date. Data from these recoveries is stored on magnetic tape for use by waterfowl biologists.

In order for the banding program to be successful, it is imperative to have the hunter's cooperation. When a hunter obtains a banded bird, the band should be removed, flattened and taped securely to a piece of heavy paper or cardboard, and mailed to Bird Banding Laboratory, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Laurel, Maryland 20811.

The following information should be included: name and address of person sending the band, all numbers and letters on the band (in case the band is lost from the envelope), date the band was obtained, place where band was found (mileage and direction from nearest town, including parish and state), how the band was obtained (on a bird shot, found dead, etc.)

The envelope should be marked "hand cancel".

The Bird Banding Laboratory will send the person reporting the band a certificate of appreciation and information on where and when the bird was banded, what kind it was, and who banded it. The biologist who banded the bird will be informed of when, where and how the band was recovered.

Animals Forecast Weather

The behavior of wildlife, if interpreted correctly, can provide clues to weather changes. If deer, for instance, behave peculiarly despite no contact with sight, smell, or sound of man, it usually means coming storm.

Wild geese move ahead of frigid weather south to warmer climates. Waterfowl fly higher during clear weather, lower during stormy weather. When birds suddenly begin singing and flitting about after prolonged storm, it usually means that clear weather is on its way.

When squirrels begin gathering nuts early and when the fur or hair on animals grows thicker than usual, chances are it will be a cold winter.

About Boating Safety

A record number of 215 boating accidents occurred during 1980, resulting in 66 fatalities on state waters.

These shocking statistics greatly alarm the department, the governor, and the U.S. Coast Guard. They should also alert all Louisiana boaters.

The Coast Guard estimates that only a small percent of boating accidents are being reported to the department, although it is required by both state and federal law. Louisiana law requires persons involved in boating accidents to file written reports within 48 hours if the accident caused a fatality, or within five days if it caused bodily injury or physical damage to property in excess of $100.

Boating accident report forms are available from the department or from the Coast Guard but the forms are not necessary to comply with the law.

The report must contain this information: the number and/or names of the boats involved; where the accident happened; time and date of accident; weather and water conditions at the time; names and addresses of owners of boats or property involved; name, address, age, and boat operating experience of the operators of the boats.

Also names and addresses of any persons injured or killed; description of any injuries; description of damage to property (including boats) and estimated costs of repairs; description of accident (including opinions as to causes); length, propulsion, horsepower, fuel and construction of reporting boat; names and addresses of known witnesses.

In addition to reporting accidents, both federal and state laws require that all boats powered by machinery or engines be registered by the department.

Leading causes of accidents in Louisiana in the order of frequency are collision with other vessels, capsizing, and persons falling overboard.

With proper safety precautions, most of these accidents can be prevented.

Some Boating Safety Tips

On water, as on land, there are rules-of-the road such as:

- Keep to the *right* in narrow channels.
- *Yield* right of way to any approaching boat.
- Overtaking boats (approaching from behind) must stay clear.
- Know your horn signals: 1 short blast means "I'm going to pass you on my *port* side." 2 short blasts mean "I'm going to pass you on my *starboard* side." 3 short blasts mean "I'm going astern." 4 short blasts mean "danger".
- In a fog, sound a *long blast* every minute.
- Rowboats, canoes, and sailboats usually have the right of way over power boats. Exception: any type of boat, if being overtaken, has the right of way.
- Keep clear of large vessels.
- Watch your wake.
- Be courteous.
- Offshore fishermen should pay careful attention to wind and tides when traveling in small craft.
- Boats towing waterskiers should be particularly careful to stay clear of other boats and obstacles such as ridges, logs and floating debris, and shoreline trees and vegetation.
- All boaters in waterski areas must stay alert to fallen skiers.
- In popular recreational lakes, be particularly careful of swimmers.

Menhaden Study

The department's seafood division recently signed an agreement with the United States Department of Energy to study what effect brine disposal at the West Hackberry Strategic Petroleum Reserve Project site will have on the area's menhaden.

Brine must be pumped out of the salt domes so that oil can be pumped in. It is the department's responsibility for finding out what effect this will have on the overall menhaden fishery.

In Louisiana the menhaden fishery is a multi-million dollar a year business and southwest Louisiana accounts for over half the landings.

Numerous industrial plants along the coast turn the small oily fish into protein meal for animal feed, especially poultry, and oil for margarine in Europe.

Dingell-Johnson Expansion (More Funds for Fishing)

Did you know that fishermen themselves, by paying a couple of extra dollars each year in excise tax on certain fishing gear, finance fisheries management projects?

This ten percent excise tax on rods, reels, and artificial lures is authorized by the Fish Restoration Act of 1950 or the Dingell-Johnson Act (D-J).

This important legislation has been responsible for supplying state fish and game departments with monies for research, management, and improvement of fisheries resources. Funds are distributed according to a set formula on a 3-1 matching basis. Every state dollar allocated for sport fish management and restoration is matched by $3 from D-J revenues.

Improvements made possible by D-J have greatly enhanced sport fishing opportunities in Louisiana and throughout the country. D-J projects include construction of new lakes and public access to lakes, protection of fish and habitat from pollution, and development of new research and management techniques, to name a few. Such endeavors result in more and healthier fish populations.

Because of the importance of additional D-J monies for continued proper funding of fisheries projects, Louisiana Congressman John Breaux introduced a bill in the 97th Congress to place a ten percent tax on certain additional fishing equipment and establish a three percent manufacturers tax on boating equipment and recreational boats under twenty-five feet. Commercial boats, kayaks, sailboats, and hydroplanes are not included.

Although not all boaters fish, they do use public boat access areas developed with D-J money. They also cruise once-polluted waters now open to recreation with D-J assistance. Already, access to many lakes is inadequate and many boat launches are deteriorating due to lack of maintenance.

Meeting these demands and new ones as well as new research and stocking programs requires more money. To sustain growing public use of waterbodies, D-J expansion would be beneficial.

The new fund, if established, will help support our fisheries program, preserve a renewable resource, and provide more fish and improved fishing.

Big Game Awards Program

The Boone and Crockett Club has once again assumed sole responsibility for maintaining North American big game trophy records.

Since 1973, Boone and Crockett has been sharing responsibility for this program with the National Rifle Association.

The Boone and Crockett Club initiated the first formal recognition of outstanding big game trophies in their 1932 records book. The club held its first competition in 1947. At first, trophies were judged by simple criteria of length and spread of horns, antlers, or skulls. By 1950, measurements were refined into the current trophy scoring system.

Information on the Boone and Crockett Club scoring system can be obtained by writing them at 424 North Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314.

For entering trophy white-tailed deer and turkey in Louisiana's state big game records, contact the game division of any of the department's district offices.

Answers to "Birds of a Feather" Quiz p. 20

1. b
2. c
3. c
4. a
5. b
6. c
7. b
8. a
9. b
10. a
11. b
12. b
13. c
14. b
15. a
16. b
17. c
18. a
19. b
20. c
21. a
22. b
23. a
24. b
25. b
26. c
27. a
28. c
29. a
30. b
31. a
32. c
33. c
34. b
35. a
36. a
37. b
38. b
39. c
40. a

If you got 15 correct that's about average. 25 correct is very good but you're not ready to teach a bird class in a major university yet. 30 is excellent and qualifies you for a scholarship in Bird Blarney. 35 is phenomonal—name your salary as Professor of Fowl Rhetoric. 40 correct—you've obviously cheated and just finished reading *Louisiana Birds* by George Lowry.

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"WE GET LETTERS..."

Both Arkansas and Mississippi have regular seasons for muzzleloading only. Louisiana has the past several years had a couple of days on specified WMA's. This past season has brought to my attention the need for education of the new muzzleloading hunter. In the Loggy Bayou area the response was tremendous and so was the carelessness and danger to the inexperience of the new hunter. As stated in the article, a muzzleloader is a little different than a modern gun.

The hunter who takes his rifle out only at the beginning of a season and puts it back at the end does not make a knowledgeable muzzleloading hunter. I would love for our state to have a regular muzzleloading season; but the hunters must be schooled in the basic knowledge. Safety can never be forgotten, especially where muzzleloading is concerned.

John M. Colvin
Ruston, La

Arrangements can be made for both hunter safety and muzzleloading education programs by writing our department's education section, P. O. Box 44095, Capitol Station, Baton Rouge, LA 70804 or by calling 504-342-5861.

—Editor

Dear Sirs:

Upon reading the article on black powder hunting by Jerry McLain, Fourth Quarter 1980, I felt I should respond. It is very encouraging to see the growing interest in muzzleloading. I have been involved in the sport for well over 10 years and am also a muzzleloading gunsmith. I have helped organize clubs in Louisiana and participate in club shoots both in and out of state. In the past 4 years I have taken two deer in regular season with my muzzleloader.

Dear Sir:

The Fourth Quarter 1980 issue contained an interesting article about J. L. Melancon, the bird call craftsman from Robeline, La.

Julia Murchison McSherry, the author of the article, provided a fascinating glimpse into the history, use and quality of these calls in relation to the bird hunter.

She does however, at one point in the article, list the different kinds of calls Melancon produces, including two varieties of owl, hawk, and predator calls. *Louisiana Conservationist* would do a service to its readership by printing this letter, to remind our sportsmen that despite the subtle message (unintended but damaging) relayed in this article, that all birds of prey, including hawks, owls and vultures are for good reason, protected by law.

Grace Smith
Lake Charles, La

Thank you for pointing out that not all birds of prey are destructive and that some are indeed protected by law. It is illegal to shoot hawks and owls. However, vultures, crows, red-winged blackbirds (rice birds), English sparrows, starlings, and (when destructive to crops) grackles and other species of blackbirds are considered outlaws and can be taken at any time. Predator calls are legal for use in hunting these birds.

We do appreciate your interest in our magazine and in the protection of birds of prey.

—Editor

Dear Sirs:

I feel I must compliment you on a fine publication that has beautiful photography and well written and interesting stories. Your publication makes me appreciate the outdoors all the more and provides much enjoyment reading by the fireside on days I can't venture afield.

David Colley III
Luling, La.

Dear Mr. Dennie:

Reference is made to the Second Quarter, 1980 Edition of the *Louisiana Conservationist.*

While reading the excellent article "Those Wild and Scenic Streams," I noticed the canoeing pictures in the lower left corners of pages five and eight. The scenes were very attractive and seemed to be pleasant excursions enjoyed by those involved. However, may I bring to your attention that these pictures did lack something. These pictures lacked the only safety devices required on all watercraft—Personal Flotation Devices (PFD). No where in either of the stream scenes can one find a PFD. Even in shallow water, a PFD may mean the difference between life and death in an unstable small craft such as a canoe. Therefore, may I recommend that visible PFD's be a part of your boating pictorials.

The "Conservationist" is an outstanding publication and this letter only reflects our concern to keep safety foremost in the public eye. The Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is recognized by the people of Louisiana as the leading state agency in outdoor and water safety. We hope our little suggestion can help maintain that leadership.

We appreciate your consideration in this matter and if I can be of any assistance, please contact me at your convenience.

G. F. Viveiros, Jr.
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard
Chief, Boating Safety Division
New Orleans, La.

You are correct, of course. Safety is of paramount importance and personal flotation devices, which are required by law, are essential to water safety. We apologize for our oversight and thank you for pointing it out to our readers.

—Editor

Dear Sirs:

In the Fourth Quarter 1980 issue, I saw a section about black powder guns. I was very impressed when I saw it because I have been looking for information about black powder guns, its safety, and how to load them. I was looking for some black powder guns in a catalog and thinking of buying one without any knowledge about them, but when I saw the article I realized my father and I should talk to someone who is experienced with black powder guns and get their advice about what kind of gun to get.

Eric Venissat
Gueydan, La.
Age 12

Lloyd Poissenot

Pie's Potpourri

By Marian "Pie" Pendley

Speckled Trout Amandine

3 whole speckled trout or 6 fillets
½ lb. sliced almonds
2 tbsps. butter
juice of ½ lemon

Soak the fish in small quantity of milk which has been seasoned with salt, pepper and about 1 tsp. of onion, scraped. After soaking, the fish should be rolled in flour and fried in deep fat.

Brown almonds in the melted butter, until they are golden brown. Add the lemon juice to the butter sauce just before serving, spooning some of the almonds over individual servings of the fish.

Fried Tenderloin of Trout

Trout fillets
Salt and pepper
Cornmeal or fish-fry meal
Cooking oil

Wash the fish, salt and pepper them, and then roll in cornmeal or fish-fry meal. Fill a dutch oven about half full of cooking oil. Let the oil get hot but not smoking. Fry the fillets a few at a time until they are golden brown. Serve immediately.

Note: Proportions are not given as they depend on whether you are cooking for two or twenty. This is just a good basic recipe and is a favorite with everyone.

Pan Fried Crappie

4 crappie (about 1 lb. each)
¼ lb. butter
salt, pepper & paprika
parsley

Heat butter in large frying pan over medium flame; do not allow butter to smoke. Place fish in pan; brown quickly on one side (about 3 minutes); turn with spatula; brown on other side 5 minutes or until meat is easily flaked with fork. Lower flame; quickly sprinkle with salt, pepper and paprika to taste.

Place fish on individual plates. Garnish with parsley and serve piping hot.

Foil-Baked Fish

2 lbs. boned fish, cut into serving pieces
1 medium onion, sliced
1 lemon
2 tbsps. butter
3 tbsps. mayonnaise
dash of Worcestershire sauce
salt and pepper to taste
extra pat of butter

Arrange fish on foil. Top with sliced onion. Make sauce of next six ingredients. Dot with extra pat of butter. Double-fold the foil and bake on coals or in 350° oven for 20 to 25 minutes.

CAPT. ROY